

Jesus' Favorite Easter Story

What do Jesus and Jonah have in common?

Matthew 12:38-42, 16:1-4, Luke 11:29-32, Jonah 1-4, 2 Kings 14:25, Nahum 3:1-4

- ➔ Both were **sent** by God to a **place** they didn't want to go.
- ➔ Both **sacrificed** themselves for **others**.
- ➔ Both were left for **dead** for **three** days.
- ➔ Both **came back** with a **salvation** message.

If "my life was ebbing away"...

Jonah 2:7-10, 3:4-10, 4:1-3, Romans 10:9-11, John 3:16, Mark 12:28-31

- ❶ Realize that there is a **God**...and it's **not me**.
- ❷ Repent = Ask for **mercy** and change your **direction**.
- ❸ Surrender = Get off the **throne** and accept a new **King**.
- ❹ Start with **obedience**...even when you don't **feel like it**.

Easter is the only hope for:

Matthew 12:24-37, 1 John 1:9, 2 Peter 3:9, Romans 5:8-10, Acts 4:12

- ▶ Any **Christian** who's heading in the **opposite** direction.
- ▶ Those who find themselves in the **enemy's camp**.

Have a great Easter...it's the only **sign we get!**

Growth Group Homework

For the week of April 8, 2012

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. If you could make a good living playing one sport for five years, and ability was not an issue, which sport would you pick and why?

2. Most of us have encountered a situation when someone was apologizing for something and it didn't seem like they really owned up to what they did. What indicators tell you someone is owning up to their stuff? What indicators cause you to question their sincerity?

3. Looking back at your notes from this week's teaching, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. This weekend, we heard some great news about God's forgiveness and restoration when we stop and surrender. The Ninevites experienced this first hand when they took radical steps to surrender to God - they fasted and wore sackcloth. Yet the key to their repentance was not these outward expressions, but rather a change in heart, action and strategy on how to do life. What strategies and/or motivations does God give us to help us turn our emotion of remorse into true repentance?

2 Corinthians 7:10-13

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. [11] See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. [12] So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. [13] By all this we are encouraged.

In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. [NIV]

Mark 8:34

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [NIV]

2 Timothy 1:7

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. [NIV]

John 16:13

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. [NIV]

Can you think of any other verses or steps you've taken that have helped you put feet to your repentance?

2. It is the "ebbing away" of our lives that often drives us to finally go to God to get things straight. Jonah's prayer in the fish is exactly that and similar to a number of other prayers recorded in the Psalms. These prayers are called lament Psalms because they express concern over a difficult situation the author is facing. Read Psalm 28 for a good example of one of these Psalms.

Psalm 28:1-9

Of David.

To you I call, O Lord my Rock;
do not turn a deaf ear to me.

For if you remain silent,
I will be like those who have gone down to the pit.

[2] Hear my cry for mercy
as I call to you for help,
as I lift up my hands
toward your Most Holy Place.

[3] Do not drag me away with the wicked,
with those who do evil,
who speak cordially with their neighbors
but harbor malice in their hearts.

[4] Repay them for their deeds
and for their evil work;
repay them for what their hands have done
and bring back upon them what they deserve.

[5] Since they show no regard for the works of the Lord
and what his hands have done,
he will tear them down
and never build them up again.

[6] Praise be to the Lord,

for he has heard my cry for mercy.
[7] The Lord is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.
My heart leaps for joy
and I will give thanks to him in song.

[8] The Lord is the strength of his people,
a fortress of salvation for his anointed one.

[9] Save your people and bless your inheritance;
be their shepherd and carry them forever. [NIV]

Lament Psalms provide a great model for how to pray when we're in difficult circumstances. There are at least four elements to each one. Looking back at Jonah 2, write which verses match each element below:

- ⇒ Description of present need
- ⇒ Prayer for help
- ⇒ Commitment to offer praise
- ⇒ Sincere thanks to God

Jonah 2:1-10

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. [2] He said:
"In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.

From the depths of the grave I called for help,
and you listened to my cry.

[3] You hurled me into the deep,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;
all your waves and breakers
swept over me.

[4] I said, 'I have been banished
from your sight;
yet I will look again
toward your holy temple.'

[5] The engulfing waters threatened me,
the deep surrounded me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

[6] To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you brought my life up from the pit,
O Lord my God.

[7] "When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, Lord,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.

[8] "Those who cling to worthless idols
forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

[9] But I, with a song of thanksgiving,
will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.

Salvation comes from the Lord."

[10] And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. [NIV]

Is there a situation in your life that you are concerned about? If so jot down one or two thoughts regarding that situation under each of the elements above. Now use those thoughts to express your own lament prayer to God.

3. The other great news from the Jonah story is that God wants to use his children to impact our world for Jesus. Most of us would welcome the opportunity to impact others for Christ, but find ourselves frustrated with how to effectively do this. What insights do the following verses give into living out God's call to make a difference for him?

Luke 11:33

"No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. [NIV]

Colossians 1:10

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, [NIV]

Colossians 3:12-14

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. [13] Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. [14] And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. [NIV]

1 Peter 3:15

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, [NIV]

Are there any environments you are in regularly where you hope to have impact or would like to increase your impact? If so, explain.

TAKING IT HOME

Looking back at this week's teaching and study, is there something you would especially like to remember or like prayer for?

Tips on Group Prayer

Prayer is an important part of being in Growth Group. Over the years we've found that group prayer goes better when we follow three simple guidelines.

WE PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME - Anyone in the group is free to introduce a prayer request either before prayer begins or during the prayer time. Once a topic is introduced, the group focuses on that request alone. Once it's covered, the group moves on to the next topic.

PRAY MORE THAN ONCE - Because the group is focusing on one topic at a time, each person is encouraged to pray several times during the prayer time for those topics they feel most led to pray about. No one is required to pray.

WE KEEP OUR PRAYERS SHORT AND SIMPLE - Group prayer goes better when members keep their prayers short and to the